



# COMMUNITY NOTES

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Dr. Robin Joy Berenson

A child's first learning environment is the family. What is learned there sets a path for all other education and development to come. To foster children's

lifetime health and wellbeing, it makes sense for the community to work together to optimize every child's chances to succeed.

At our *Raising Healthy Families: Building Connection, Compassion, and Community* this month, attendees heard from expert presenters on key topics affecting Marin families. They discussed the challenges to the health and wellbeing of families, to diversity and inclusiveness in schools and neighborhoods, and the many opportunities and strategies parents, grandparents, teachers and professionals can embrace to achieve this shared objective.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to say *thank you* to all who participated in the success of our *Raising Healthy Families* conference: To our co-host, the Marin County Office of Education, which provided the venue for the event; to our sponsors, whose generous support will provide needed services to vulnerable Marin families; to our Community Partners, whose services and resources serve to strengthen our community; to our excellent speakers; to CIP staff, intern-therapists, and volunteers; and, finally, to the community members and professionals who came to learn the practical strategies and what can be done to build connection, compassion, and community.

We are so grateful for your support!



## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### A DAY OF LEARNING AND SHARING

How do we go about creating an inclusive community where differences are valued and respected? How can we respond to our children with intention and compassion? What can we do to keep children safe and connected in this digital age?

These timely topics and more were the subject of CIP's community conference, *Raising Health Families, Building Connection, Compassion, and Community*, held at the Marin Office of Education, which co-hosted the event. Afternoon sessions offered separate public and professional programs.

#### "The Most Important Conversation"

Marin County Superintendent of Schools Mary Jane Burke welcomed the gathering and introduced keynote speaker Dr. Matt Willis, Public Health Officer for Marin County. Dr. Willis began with the mission of Marin Health and Human Services: "To promote and protect the health, wellbeing, self-sufficiency, and safety of all people in Marin." The word "all," he said, was the most significant. How to fulfill this mission is "the most important conversation we can have."

Each year, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation publishes the health rankings of all California counties. For five years, Marin has been named "the healthiest overall." Yet in four areas, Marin is in the lower 50%: excessive alcohol consumption; drug poisoning, including opioid addiction; alcohol impaired driving; and income inequality.

In the time from 2006 to 2013, opioid prescriptions doubled. A survey of Marin high school students revealed that 1 in 5 had "misused painkillers."

What can we do? Coordination and collaboration are essential to address public needs. "The silos we work within are artificial," Dr. Willis believes. We need to form partnerships among Marin agencies, which is what the Rx Safe Marin has done, bringing together representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, the District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, and the Office of Education.

Projecting an image of Marvel comics superheroes, Dr. Willis explained, "Everyone has a superpower to bring to the table."



Dr. Matt Willis, MD, MPH

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## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

# THE ILLUSION OF CONNECTION: PARENTING IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Noting that there is always reluctance to embrace new technologies, psychotherapist, lecturer and former CIP Assistant Clinical Director, **Mark Edwards, MS, LMFT**, explained that parents and others of the older generation are at a disadvantage, being “digital immigrants,” while our children are “digital natives” (terms coined by education writer Marc Prensky). Natives were “born into the current information technology revolution,” and as a result “are adept at the intricacy of communication through social media and instant messaging.” It’s important that we who are less at ease with new technologies reject the notion that they are “out to get us.”

## The Paradox of Social Media

Social interactions are extremely complex, Edwards noted. Established communication conventions require “a response cost.” For example, in-person communication requires a degree of effort that phone communication does not. Email and texting require even less.

Removing the social context and conventions from communication via social media, thus exacting a lower response cost, makes these modes of communication more attractive. Social media makes it easy to feel connected, even while communication is less real, and we are, in fact, less connected.

## Social Outcomes

Among several theories about the social outcomes of teen use of online communication, two most favored are “The Rich Get Richer” and “Compensation Hypothesis.” In the first, “studies find that internet use is associated with better outcomes for extroverts and worse outcomes for introverts.” Some introverts may be more vulnerable to problematic internet use.

The second theory is “proposed as an alternate model and suggests that the internet is more beneficial for socially anxious and isolated people.” The takeaway message from these contrasting findings, Edwards states, is “Know your child.”

Parents should talk with their children about their online activities and discuss ground rules for becoming “wise digital citizens.” For example, young people may not realize that information, once posted online, is “forever.” We should discuss with them what is and is not safe to post online, and other ways to stay safe.

A key point to recognize is the phenomenon of “online dishibition” that results from three aspects of online interaction. “Anonymity (you can’t see who I am); invisibility (you can’t see what I do)” and “asynchronicity,” lack of real-time feedback. These can lead to more problematic aspects of internet use, including cyberbullying.

Edwards stressed that there are several important steps parents can and should take if their child is being cyberbullied. Good information, including about legal recourse, is available at [CyberBullying.org](http://CyberBullying.org).

Edwards ended his presentation with some guidelines for parents:

- Convey to children the importance of being “right here; right now.”
- Let children know that difficult feelings, such as boredom, “are worth experiencing.”
- Emphasize the importance of face-to-face contact.
- When the family gets together, such as mealtimes, all screens (even parents’) should be face down on the table.
- There is a difference between what we need and what we want.

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## IN MEMORIAM: PATRICIA ROSS SHELTON, PhD, LMFT

We are very saddened to note the passing of a dear member of the CIP community, **Patricia Ross Shelton (Morf), PhD, LMFT**, on December 7th, 2017, in San Rafael, CA.

Pat was a beloved teacher and supervisor at CIP, and for many years co-directed the Couples Emotionally Focused Therapy Program with **Marianne Stefancic, LMFT**. Pat was an excellent therapist and did amazing relationship-saving work with her many clients.

Her friend, **Marjorie Walters**, wrote, "During her long career as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Pat's devotion to her work sprang from her love of her patients, a well that never ran dry. Her contribution to the understanding and teaching of couple therapy was widely recognized and lauded."



## CIP CHECKLISTS FOR HEALTH: GUIDES FOR PARENTS

A child's behavior can give parents valuable information about his or her emotional health and ability to cope with the everyday stresses of childhood. CIP has created several *Checklists for Health* to aid parents in identifying behaviors that may be early symptoms of problems that can benefit from professional help. Early attention can often prevent developing problems or keep them from becoming worse.

Symptoms are grouped into several categories: Eating / Sleeping (e.g., poor appetite or overeating; sleep difficulties); Social Interactions (e.g., trouble joining group activities; withdrawal/isolation); Emotions/Attention (e.g., sadness or hopelessness; recklessness, frequent injuries); Communication and Self Expression (e.g., negative self-talk, "I can't do it;" lying; destructiveness); Situational Factors (e.g., recent or unresolved loss: death, divorce).

Each checklist also offers advice for parents to keep in mind to foster children's positive emotional development:

- Your relationship with your child is the most important thing in their world.
- Let your child know what a delight he/she is to you.
- Value your child's uniqueness and authentic self.
- Spend time outside.
- Spend time reading and let children listen to books.
- Spend unstructured time together.
- Play games, do puzzles, build things, create art.
- Explore the world together.
- Create special play times where your child takes the lead; follow him/her.
- Decide on reasonable, clear rules and enforce them consistently.

*Checklists for Health* for young children and adolescents are available on our website, [www.cipmarin.org](http://www.cipmarin.org).





## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### A DAY OF LEARNING AND SHARING

*(continued from page 1)*

Income inequality has a major impact on health. A person born in Marin City has a life expectancy of 74 years; a person born in Ross, 94 years. Another major influence on health and mortality in adulthood are adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which include abuse, neglect, substance abuse or violence in the home, and homelessness, among others.

Developing resiliency can mitigate the negative effects of ACEs. Contributing to resiliency are a stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent or other adult, and learning to cope with manageable threats to physical and psychological wellbeing. Elements of resilience, listed by Dr. Willis, were courage, creativity, hope, a sense of humor, and “your own super power.”

#### Building An Inclusive Community



*Moderator Carrie Sterns*

A panel discussion, “How to Raise Children Who Are Compassionate about Difference,” featured five experts working with different sectors of the community. Each was asked to introduce themselves and their work, after which they discussed what parents and community members could do to improve inclusiveness and foster compassion within their families and beyond.

**Moderator Carrie Sterns, Jeremiah Fellowship Director at**

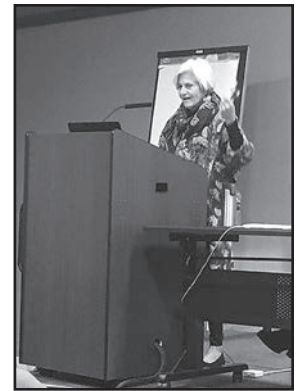
**Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice**, explained that experiences of exclusion in her personal history had led her to a life goal of promoting inclusiveness.

**Karen Kaplan, Executive Director of Wings Learning Center and Executive Director of Offerings**, presented a program titled, “See Me Please,” about her work with children and young adults with autism and communication disorders, sharing some of their voices. “I am more like you than different,” said one.

A good place to start changing the way we perceive others, Kaplan advised, is to open ourselves to appreciation of diversity. It’s necessary to examine our own assumptions and biases about people with developmental and physical differences, in order to set aside judgments and see past difference to each individual’s strengths and capabilities.

**Pepe Gonzalez, principal of Laurel Dell Elementary School**, explained how public education in Marin fails low-income families and children. While many children in Marin attend preschool, learning their letters and numbers before kindergarten, others do not. “Already it’s not a level playing field,” Gonzalez noted. When it comes time for middle-school, many more affluent parents, concerned about the quality of education for their child, opt for private schools, leaving lower income students in the public schools.

During high school, income inequality further affects students. While more affluent students have time to engage in extracurricular activities and receive tutoring to do well on college entrance exams, children from lower-income families may hold after school jobs, or have family responsibilities. These valuable life skills, however, are not what colleges and universities look for. Later, employers, too, place higher value on the critical skills of higher education over life skills.



*Panelist Karen Kaplan*



*Panelists from left to right, Leah Seidler, LCSW; Janna Barkin; Pepe Gonzalez*

Gonzalez believes this systemic inequality needs to be addressed through grassroots efforts, from the students themselves and other advocates. California needs to enact universal preschool, so that all students can get a head start on education.

**Janna Barkin, author of *He’s Always Been My Son***, a book about raising her transgender child, told the story of her second daughter, who, from the earliest age, preferred activities, toys and clothes more typical of boys. At age three, her child told Barkin outright, “I’m a boy.” Janna sought out resources to help her to understand and advocate for her transgender child. There weren’t many resources

available at the time. “That’s why I wrote my book – to share my story.” It’s important for others to do the same, she said. Fortunately, today there are many more resources for families dealing with gender issues.

Transgender children face many challenges, especially emotionally. The single most important factor for emotional health is acceptance by their families for who they are. “You need to look at the person,” without labels. Her advice about how to address biases: “Explore your own gender story. Recognize that everyone is different in some way.”

CIP Assistant Clinical Directors Arianna Heller, PsyD, MA.ED, and Leah Seidler, LCSW, standing in for ailing Karen DeVaney, PsyD, offered information on the role of inclusion for youth. Feeling connected and belonging are essential for adolescents. Teens’ mental health is vulnerable during the high school years, with depression experienced by up to 30% of students.



Panelist Arianna Heller, PsyD, MA.ED

Many times parents may see their child has a problem or that things are difficult in the home, but don’t know what to do to help or resolve the problem. In many cases, professional help can be instrumental. Agencies, such as Community Institute for Psychotherapy, offer family therapy and support, couple therapy and so on. Any of these can make an important difference.

When asked what parents can do to foster compassion and inclusiveness among their children, all panelists pointed to the importance of modeling attitudes and behaviors of inclusiveness, respect, and compassion for others. Pepe Gonzalez commented, “Often parents have fears of other populations different from themselves and pass those fears onto their children.” To combat these biases, “be super careful of your actions.”

Seidler advocates openly acknowledging differences between ourselves and the people with whom we’re interacting, for example, therapists with their clients. “Let’s explore our differences.” Dr. Heller advises an attitude of curiosity. “If you’re from a majority, keep your eyes open, pay attention to circumstances you take for granted.”

Sterns explained being well intentioned is not enough. “We need to pay attention to who is being left out, excluded—those who might be suffering.”

### Parenting with Mindfulness

Grace Fisher, LMFT, JD, M.Ed, a teacher at Spirit Rock Insight Meditation Center, offered a presentation that included many visualization and experiential exercises. She explained that how we respond to our children and how we would wish to respond are not always in sync.

Mindfulness can enable us to slow down so that we can make choices. This gives us a chance to pause between the anger and response, so we can respond with respect and compassion. It’s a way we can embody our own best selves, so we can parent with a sense of integrity and ethics.

Mindfulness is being aware in the moment: *In this moment, it’s like this*. “Awareness,” Fisher explained, “is our refuge.” It enables us to stop from time to time in our hectic lives and ask, *Where am I?*

“So much of mindfulness is setting intentions. So, too, with parenting.” She advises parents first thing each morning to take a moment to set intentions for the day. This will help enable us to greet and respond to children in a more aware and positive manner. A practice of mindfulness, setting intentions, will allow us to “create a space in the lives of our children,” to honor and be fully present with them.

## SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT:

# NEWPORT ACADEMY — A NEW KIND OF TEEN REHAB



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Newport Academy is a teen treatment center with

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Jamison Monroe, Jr., founder and CEO, explains, “We founded Newport Academy to bring sustainable healing

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Newport Academy’s tailored clinical approach and gender-specific treatment environments are designed to allow teens to feel comfortable in their own skin and build strong peer support—essential in both treatment and long-term recovery.

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## *A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Donors*

March 1, 2017 – March 1, 2018

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of our donors and grantors. You make our work in the community possible! Because of you, CIP is here helping families, healing individuals, and strengthening our community. Thank you!

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The bank has supported many of Marin County’s nonprofit organizations and civic groups that impact our communities through initiatives such as education, social services, and affordable housing.

“Our Union Bank teams are proud to support the Community Institute for Psychotherapy and we applaud its important work,”



said Vince Fucci, Union Bank managing director and regional manager for the East Bay and Marin region. “We are especially excited to sponsor CIP’s *Raising Healthy Families* Conference that supports mental health across age groups. It’s a great way for all of us to come together to build our community.”

We thank Union Bank for their generous support!

Learn more at [www.unionbank.com](http://www.unionbank.com)

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*All event proceeds go directly to support CIP's safety-net programs. Through our sliding scale and pro bono services, CIP assures that disadvantaged families and individuals have access to the quality mental health care they need to enjoy emotional stability and live full, productive lives.*

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- CIP safety-net services work locally, in the schools, with other social service agencies, to strengthen our community.
- CIP stops cycles of family violence, abuse, helplessness, and hopelessness.
- CIP relies on the donated services of more than 100 professionals to provide a highly cost-effective solution to a vital community need.

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*Community Institute for Psychotherapy (CIP) is a nonprofit, tax exempt center founded in 1977 to provide high-quality, low-cost counseling and psychological services to individuals and families who don't have the resources to pay full fees for professional help. CIP offers a full range of services designed to meet a variety of needs.*

*We at CIP believe that through psychotherapy, training, education, and prevention, we have a vital role to play in personal and global change. We believe the healing of the individual and the healing of the planet are inseparable.*

*Our work is accomplished in cooperation and coordination with a wide variety of public and private agencies and individuals throughout Marin County.*

Visit us at [www.cipmarin.org](http://www.cipmarin.org)

*A benefit for Community Institute for Psychotherapy*  
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*Mark Edwards, MS, LMFT*

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